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Public Comments on Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities: Structure and Practices of the Video Relay Service Program:=====

Title: Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities: Structure and Practices of the Video Relay Service Program

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Comment: CG Docket Nos. 03-123 and 10-51

I am not deaf, but I know firsthand how VRS works. VRS allows people who are deaf or hard of hearing to use the "phone" to communicate comfortably and easily just like people who can hear. In this way, it has changed the lives of so many people who are deaf. With VRS they can do the things we take for granted - making a doctor's appointment, calling your child's school, ordering a pizza. VRS puts people who are deaf on a level playing field.

The changes proposed by the FCC would undo much of this progress. VRS largely relies on highly skilled American Sign Language interpreters. These are the people who relay the conversation between the deaf and the hearing participants. The FCC wants to drastically cut the rate they pay VRS companies for providing this service. Obviously, this will have an immediate and negative effect on the ability of VRS companies to employ and train qualified interpreters.

The FCC has also suggested that VRS can be just as effectively provided through a software app that is used on common platforms like the iPad, a computer or smart TV. This ignores all of the innovation that VRS companies have put into their videophones and other technologies that takes into account the special needs of the deaf and hard of hearing.

If the FCC takes away skilled ASL interpreters and innovative equipment, VRS as we know it today won't exist. This would be a huge step backward for the rights and opportunities of Americans who are deaf and hard of hearing.

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